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RSPB

first book of butterflies and moths

Derek Niemann



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sustainable forests.

Butterflies and moths

Butterflies and moths come in lots
of colours – red, blue, green, yellow,
orange. Be careful not to touch them
though. Their wings and bodies are
very soft.

This book will help you name many of
the butterflies and moths you see. It tells
you where you might find them. And it
shows you how you can tell them apart.

At the back of this book is a Spotter's
Guide to help you remember the
butterflies and moths you find.
You can also find out more about the life
of a butterfly here.

Turn the page to find out more about
butterflies and moths!



Large skipper

Skippers get their name from the way they skip from flower to flower. You can see these butterflies in places where there is long grass. Skipper caterpillars like to eat the grass.

Skippers often sit with their front wings lifted up and their back wings down flat.

Orange and brown wings

Skipper caterpillars have a flap on their bottom for flicking away their poo!

Swallowtail

This is the biggest butterfly in Britain. It has very long tips on its wings that look like a swallow's tail. You can only find this butterfly in a marshy area called the Norfolk Broads.

The female lays her eggs on a plant called milk parsley.

Blue and red patches that look like eyes

Yellow and black wings

Long tips on back wings



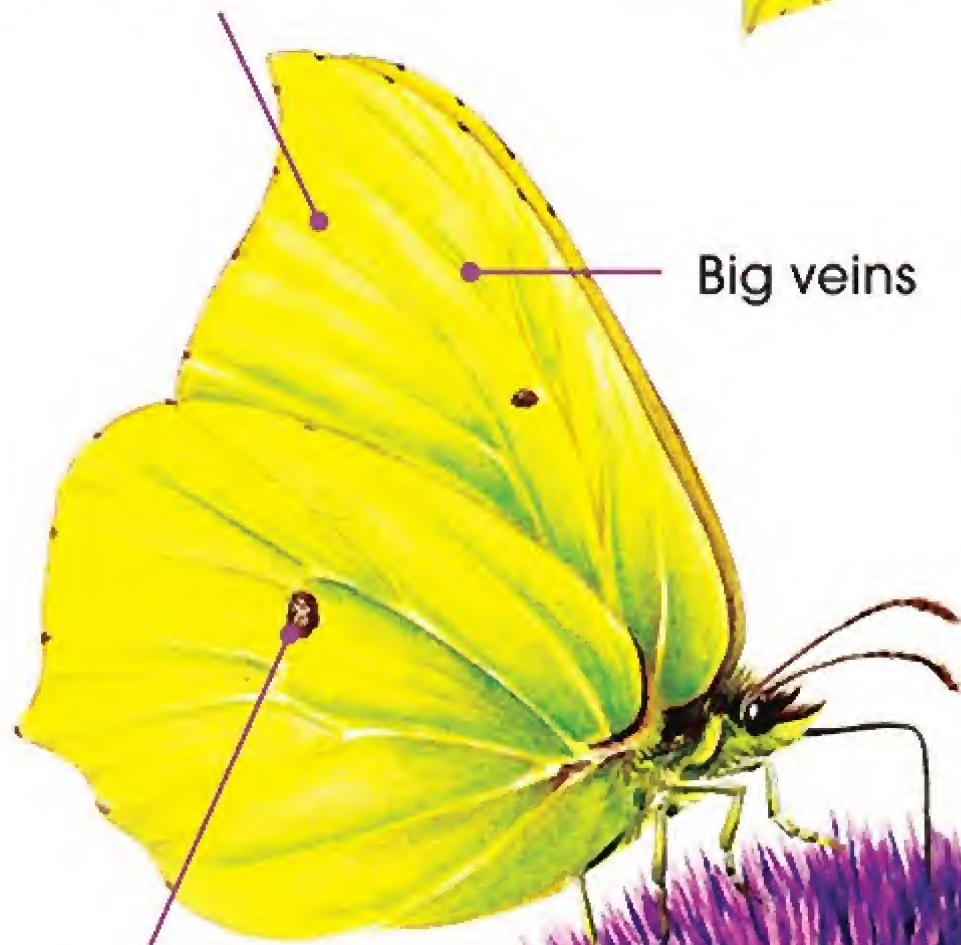
Brimstone

Look for this yellow butterfly in gardens, woods and fields in early spring. This insect is the colour of butter. That may be where the word butterfly comes from.

Males have yellow wings. Females have pale green wings that can look white



Pointy wing tips



Big veins

Little orange spots

Brimstone butterflies always rest with their wings closed together.



Large white

This butterfly is one of two called a cabbage white. The caterpillars eat cabbages and brussel sprouts.

In autumn, the caterpillar turns into a cocoon called a chrysalis [kriss-ah-liss]. It hatches as a butterfly in the spring.



Female has two black spots

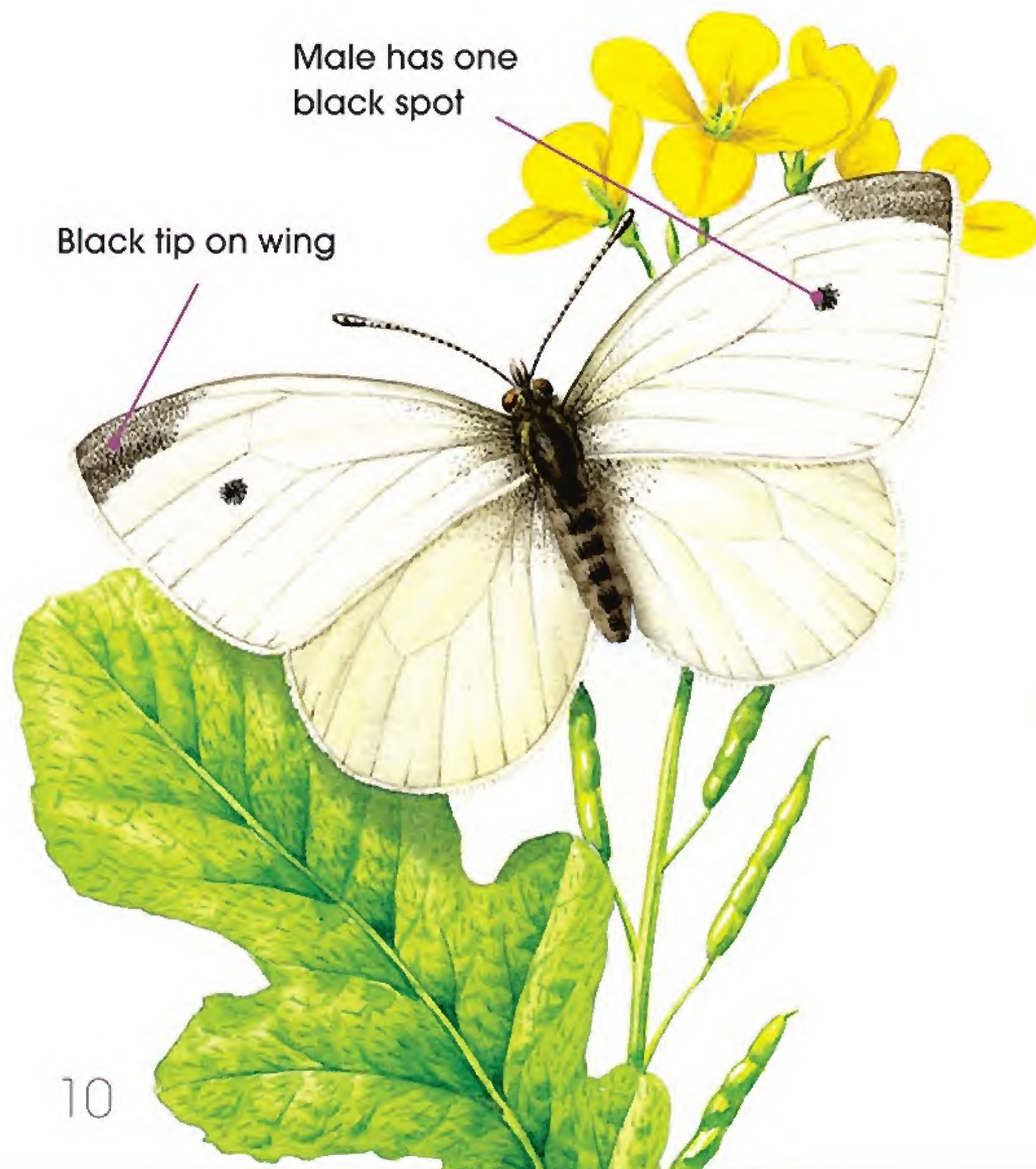


Black edges



Small white

This butterfly is also sometimes called a cabbage white. Small whites have long tongues to drink nectar. They roll them up when they do not need them.



Green-veined white



Look for this white butterfly in the countryside, especially in damp places. When it lands, you can see the big green veins on its wings.

Green streaks on underside of wing

Female butterflies only eat nectar. Males sometimes land on bare earth to lick up goodness in the soil.



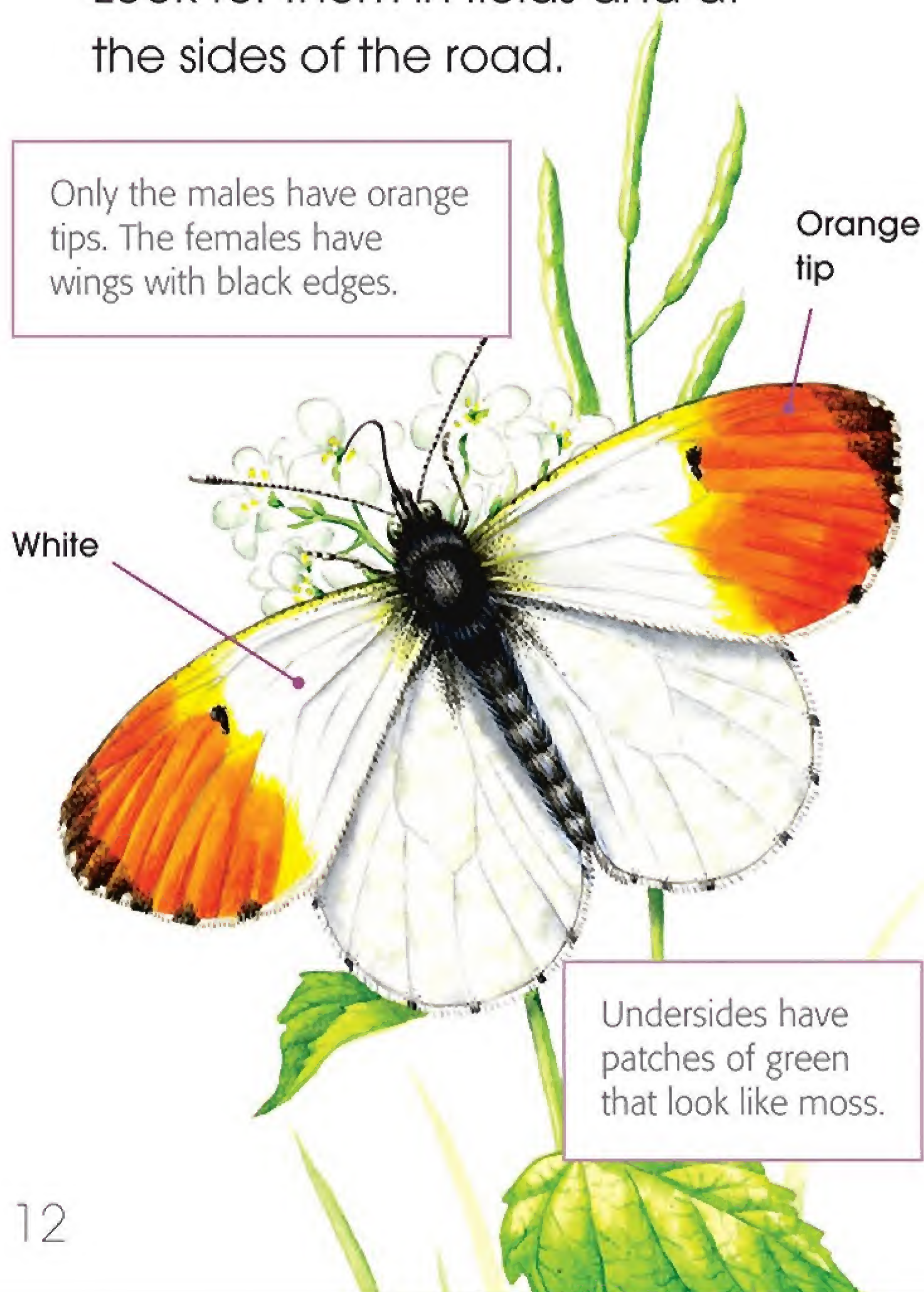
Female has more dark marks than male



Orange-tip

This is the only white butterfly that has orange tips on its wings. Orange-tips fly in May and June. Look for them in fields and at the sides of the road.

Only the males have orange tips. The females have wings with black edges.



Purple hairstreak

Purple hairstreaks don't fly very often! Most of the time, they sit in trees, licking sticky honeydew off the leaves.

Sometimes purple hairstreaks come down to drink nectar from bramble flowers.

Silver underneath with white streak

Purple above



This butterfly gets its name from the streak on the underside of its wings.



Small copper

You can see this little orange and brown butterfly all over Britain. Watch it fly up from its perch to chase another butterfly away. This is my place!



Sits with wings open to catch the sun

Black spots

The small copper caterpillars feed on plants called docks and sorrels.

Back wings mostly brown



Brown argus

There are two kinds of argus butterfly that look very similar. In southern Britain, you usually see brown argus butterflies. Northern brown argus butterflies live in places with lots of hills.

This is a brown argus. A Northern brown argus does not usually have orange spots on its front wings.

Dark brown

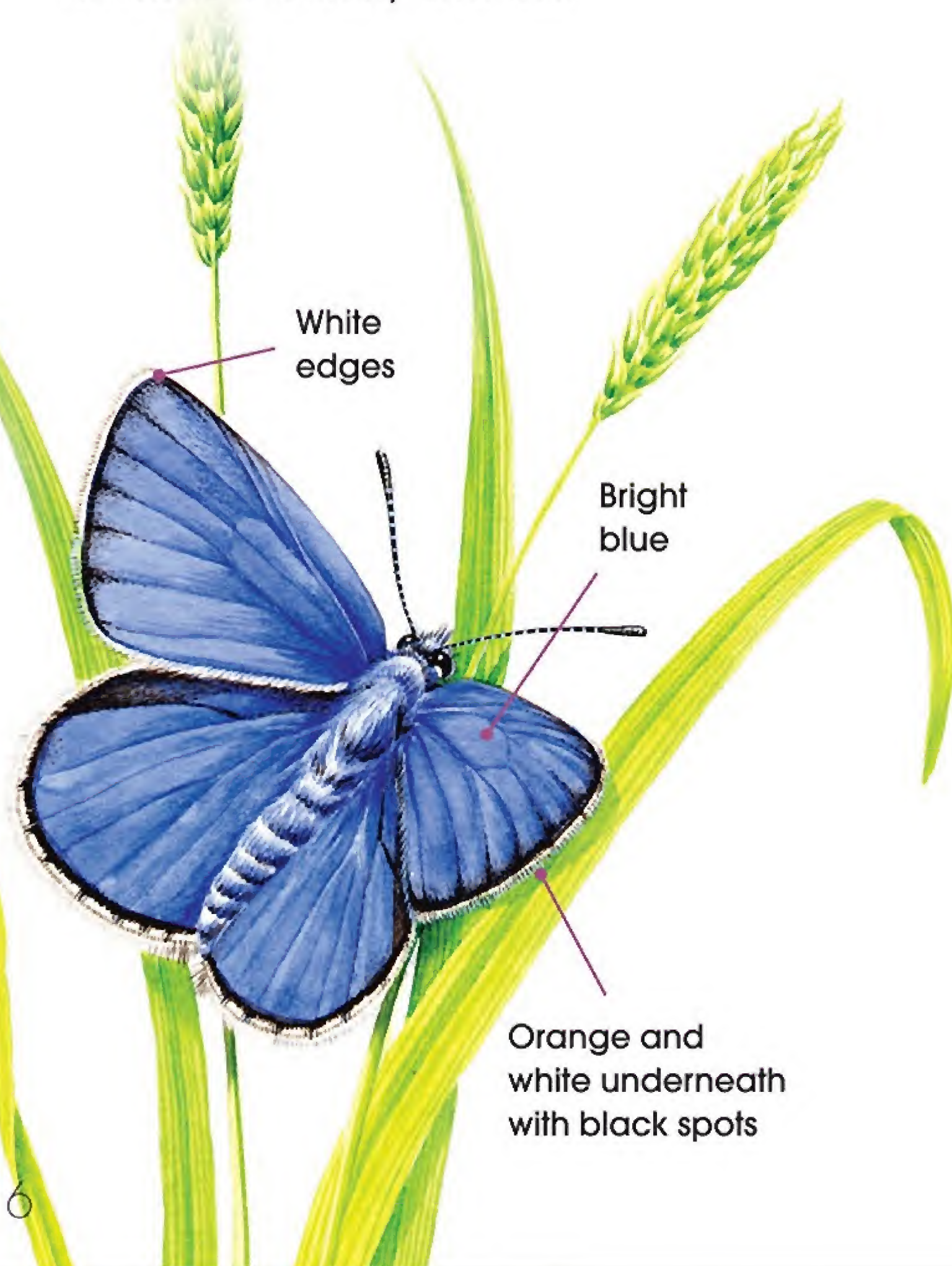
Rows of orange spots on edges of wings

Black spot. Often a white spot on northern brown argus



Common blue

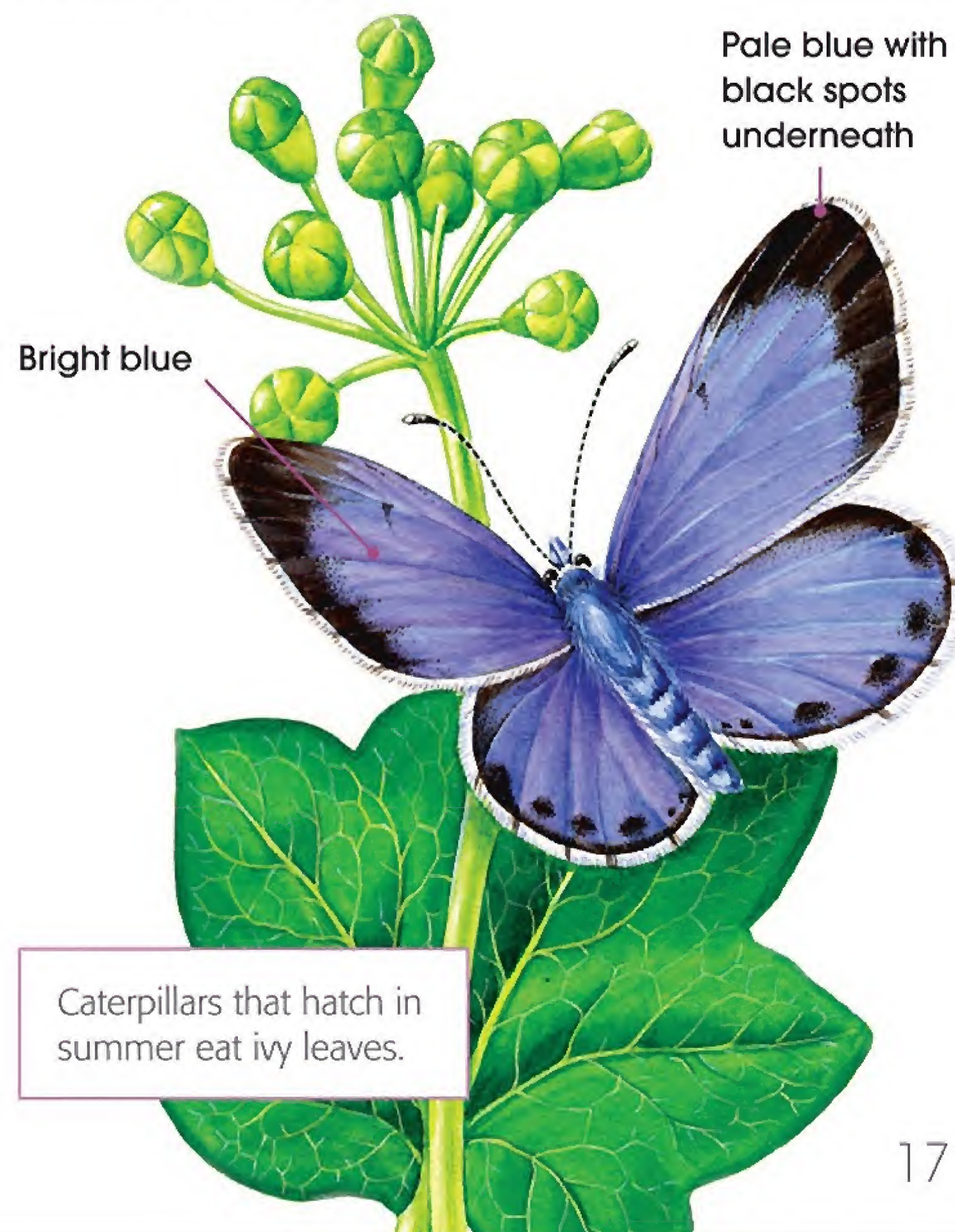
The common blue butterfly lives in grassy places in the countryside. But only the male is blue. The female is mostly brown.



Holly blue

Look out for this blue butterfly in gardens, even in the middle of cities. It flutters around trees and bushes.

Caterpillars that hatch in spring eat holly berries, buds and leaves.



Caterpillars that hatch in summer eat ivy leaves.



Painted lady

Every spring, these butterflies fly all the way here from North Africa. They can fly over 100 miles in a day.

White marks on black tips



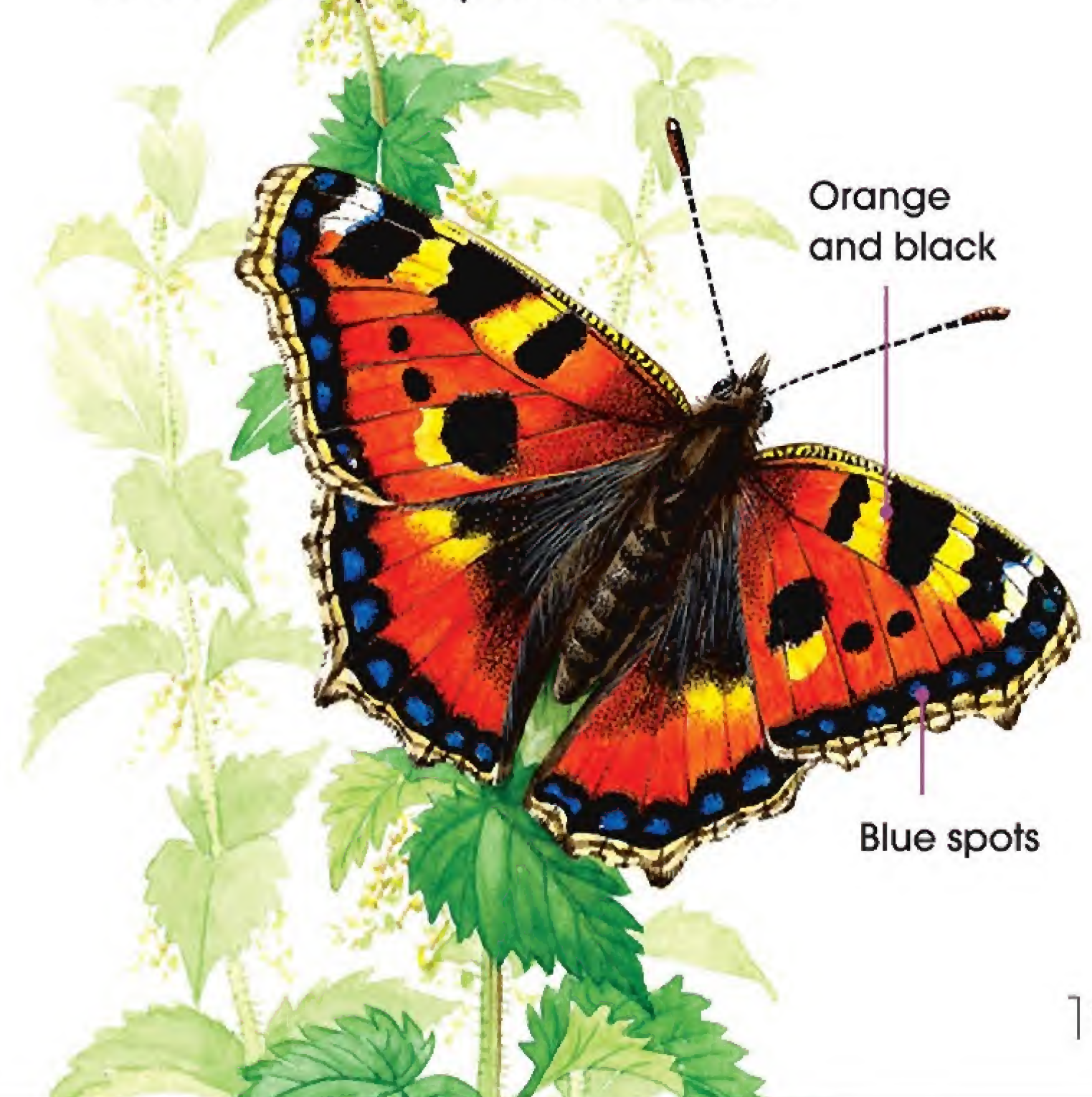
This insect was named because it was supposed to look like a grand lady wearing lots of make-up!



Small tortoiseshell

These common butterflies like to travel. Every day, they fly from place to place. In the autumn, the adults sleep in sheds, garages, or even in people's houses.

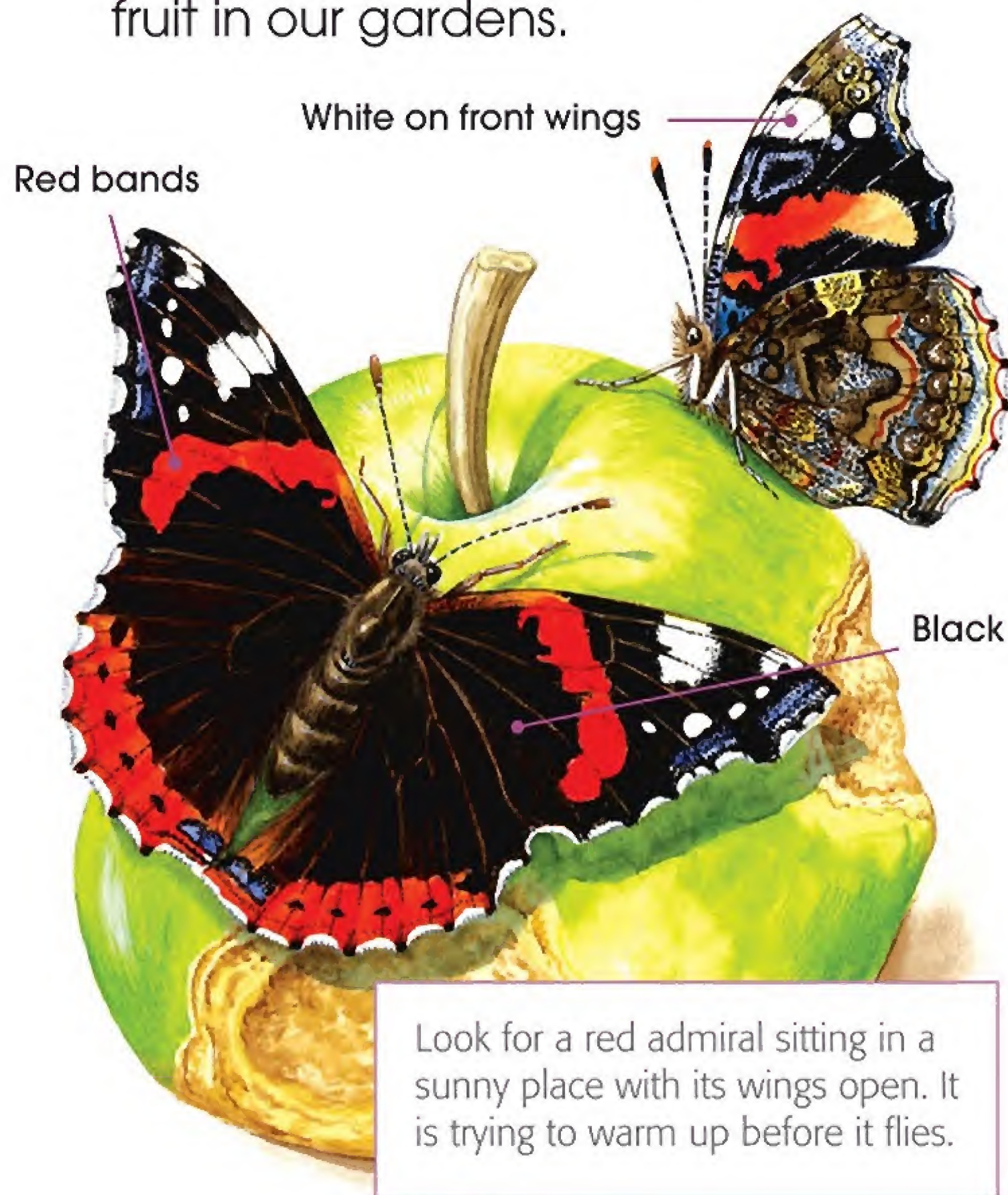
Small tortoiseshell caterpillars make a web around themselves. It hides them from creatures that want to eat them.





Red admiral

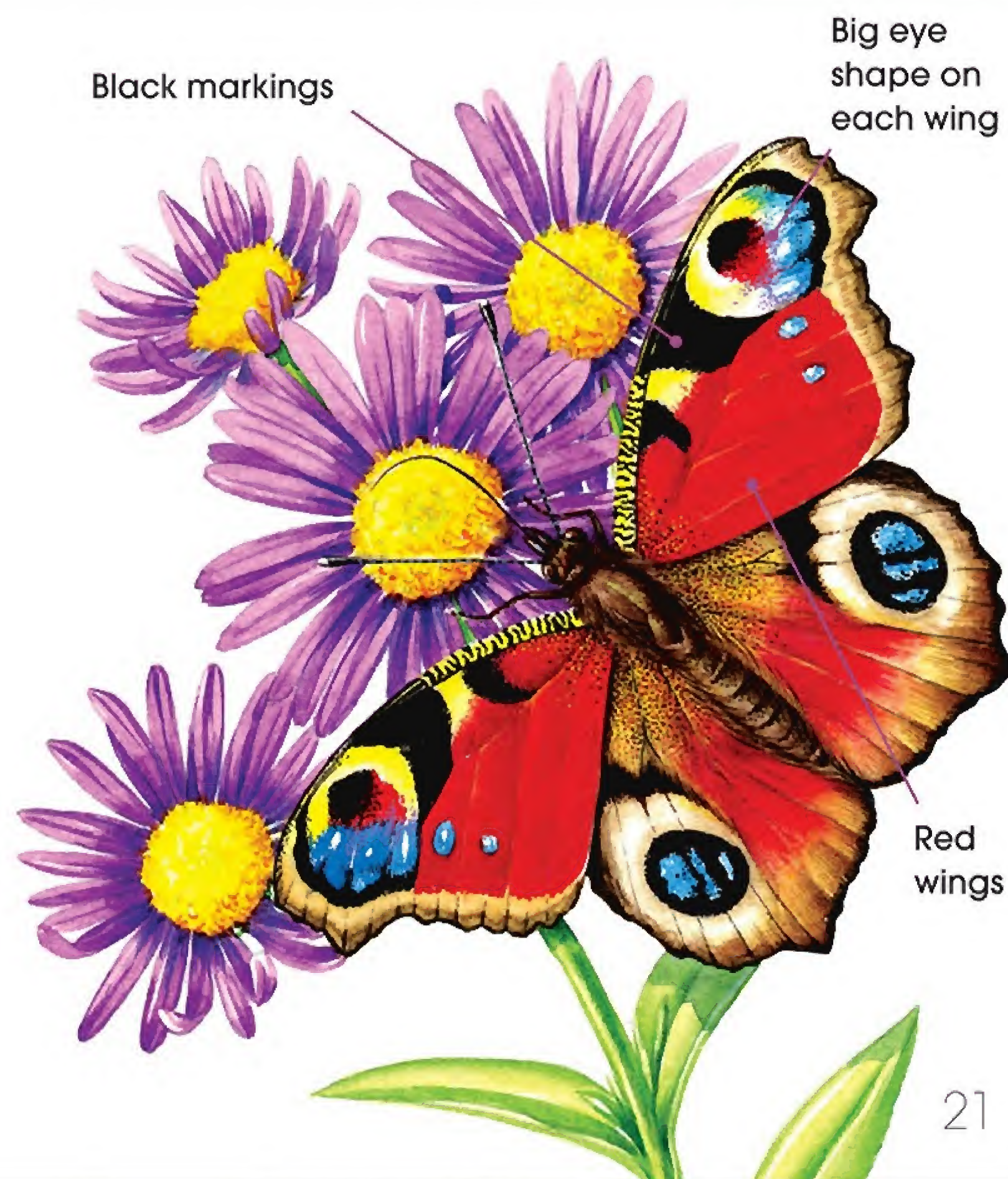
In spring or autumn, this big, strong butterfly flies hundreds of miles to get here from other countries. The adults feed on nectar and rotting fruit in our gardens.



Peacock

The big eyes on this butterfly's wings look just like the eyes in a peacock's tail. They are not real eyes, of course!

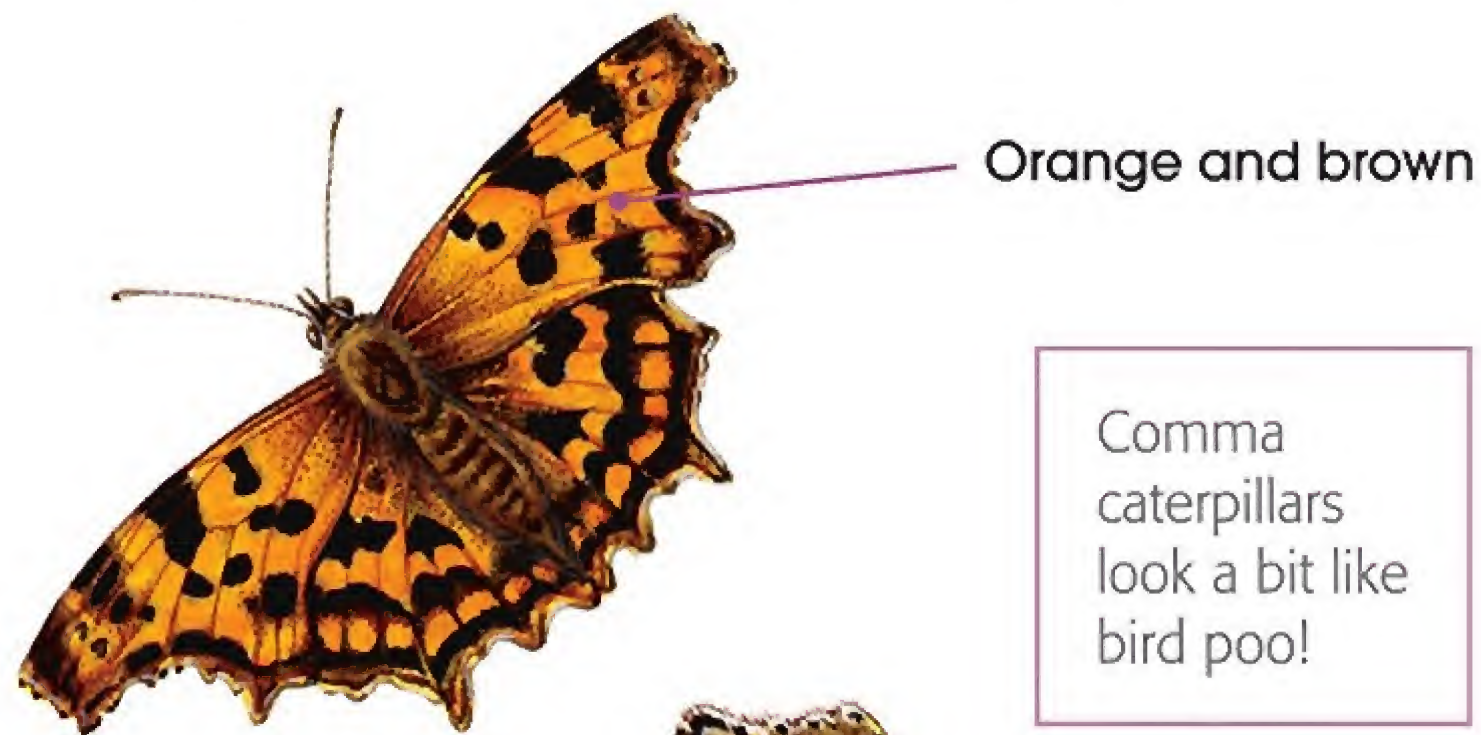
Look out for spiky black peacock caterpillars feeding on nettles.



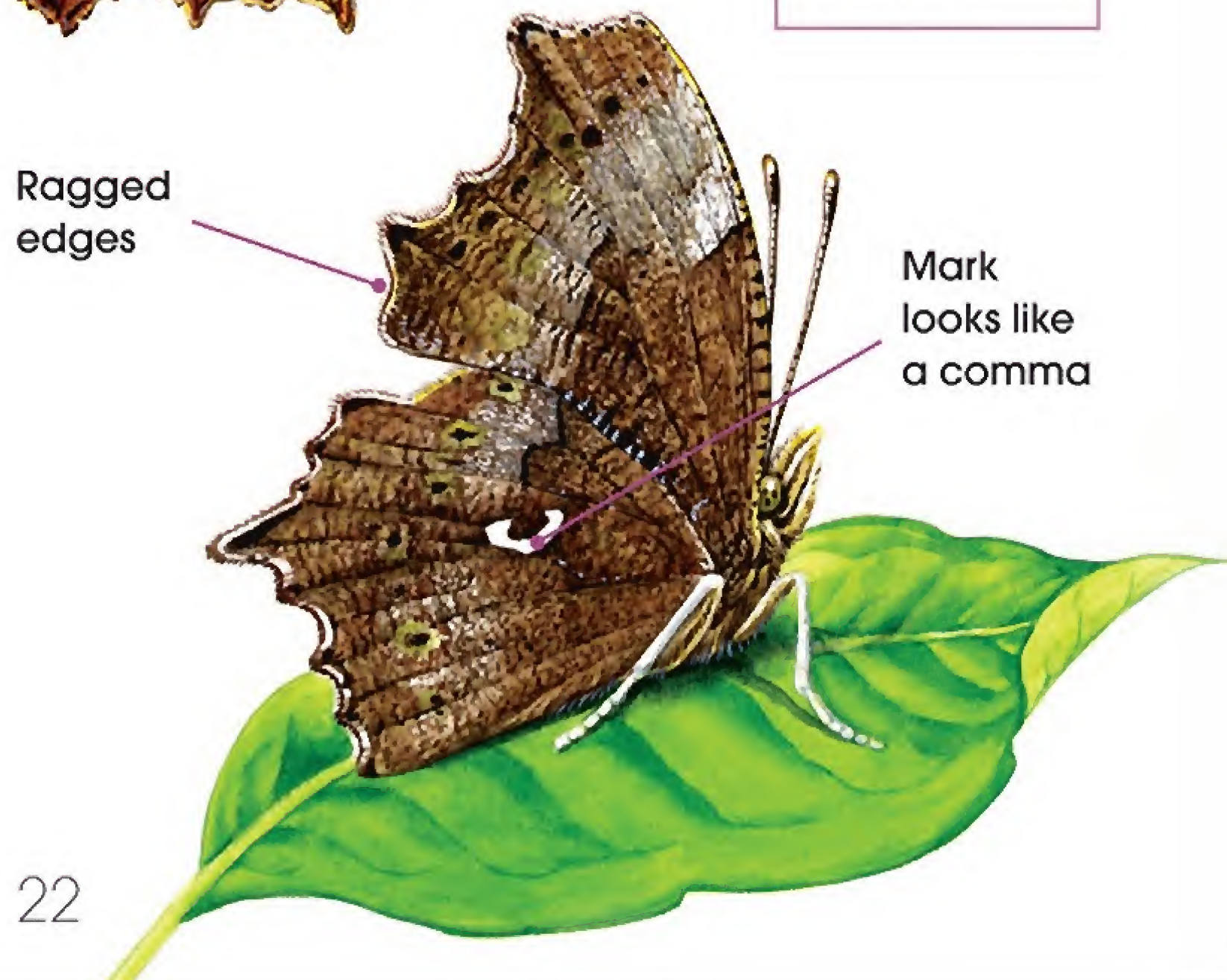


Comma

This butterfly wanders through the countryside looking for places to feed and breed. When it closes its wings together, it looks just like a dead leaf.



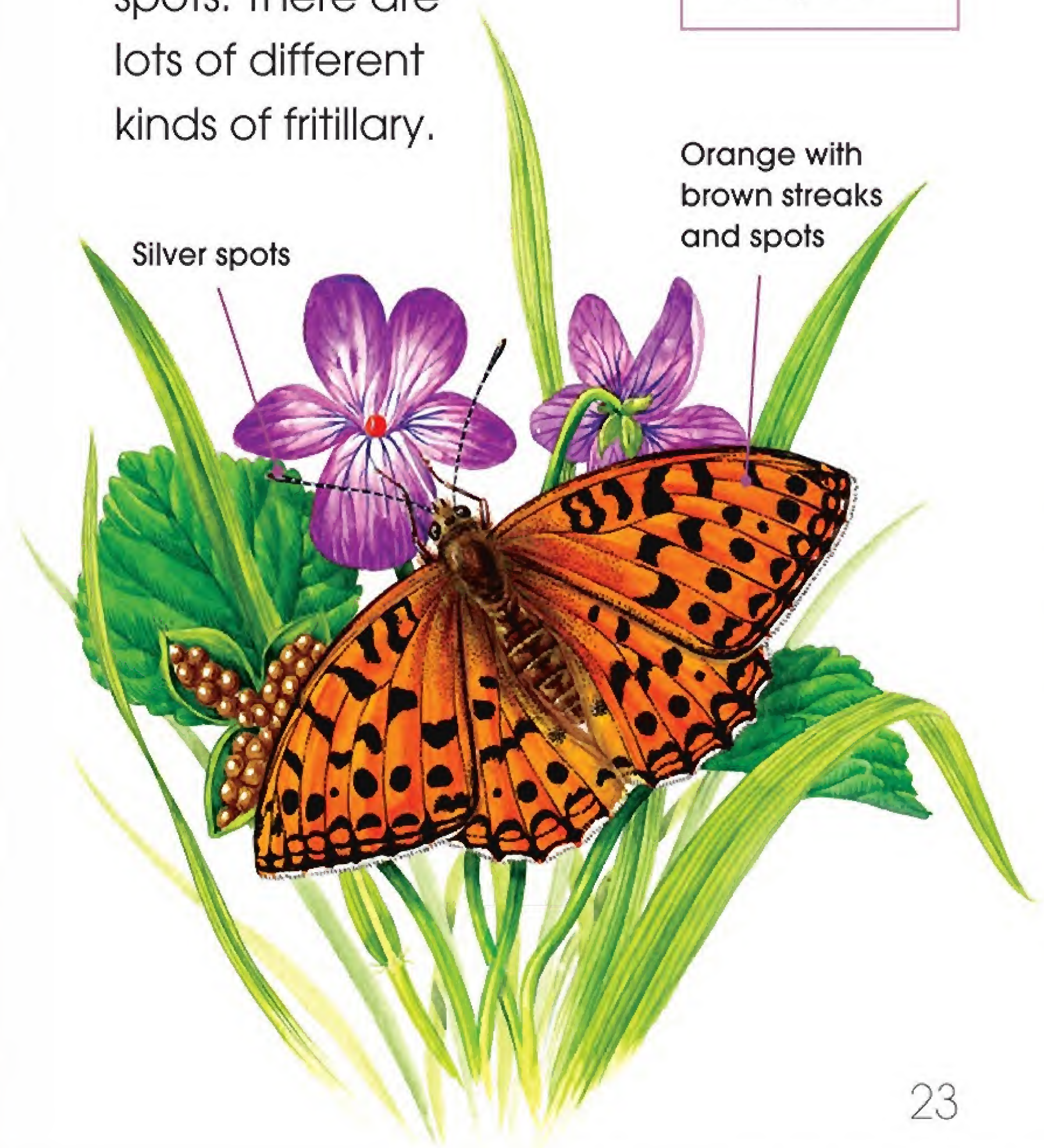
Comma caterpillars look a bit like bird poo!



Dark green fritillary

These butterflies are orange with lots of brown spots. There are lots of different kinds of fritillary.

Fritillaries lay their eggs on violet plants.





Speckled wood

A male speckled wood lands in the hedge. When another insect comes close, he flies up to it. If it is another male speckled wood, he will try to chase it away.

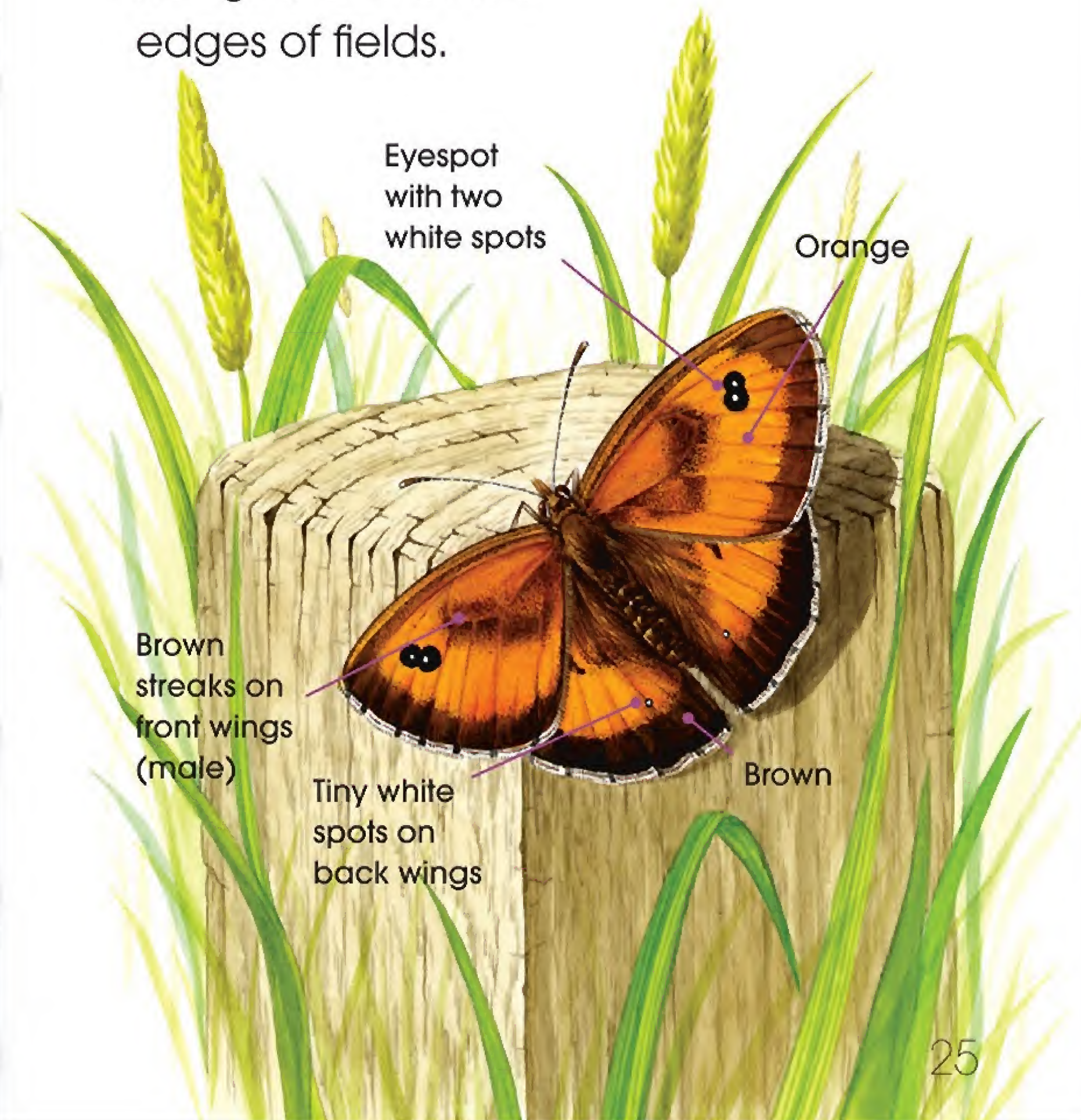
The caterpillars can live through the winter on the ground. They eat grass.



Gatekeeper

This butterfly is also called the hedge brown. You can see it flying over the long grass at the bottom of hedges, and at the edges of fields.

We only see these butterflies in July and August.





Marbled white

You can always pick out a marbled white. Look for this black and white butterfly in meadows in July and August.

Females fly over the grass and drop their eggs in it!

White patches on black

Undersides are yellowish

Grayling



Look for graylings flying fast on cliff-tops by the sea. You can also find them in the sand dunes. Some live on heaths and in old quarries too.

After the grayling lands, it tucks its front wings under its back wings. This makes it very hard to see.

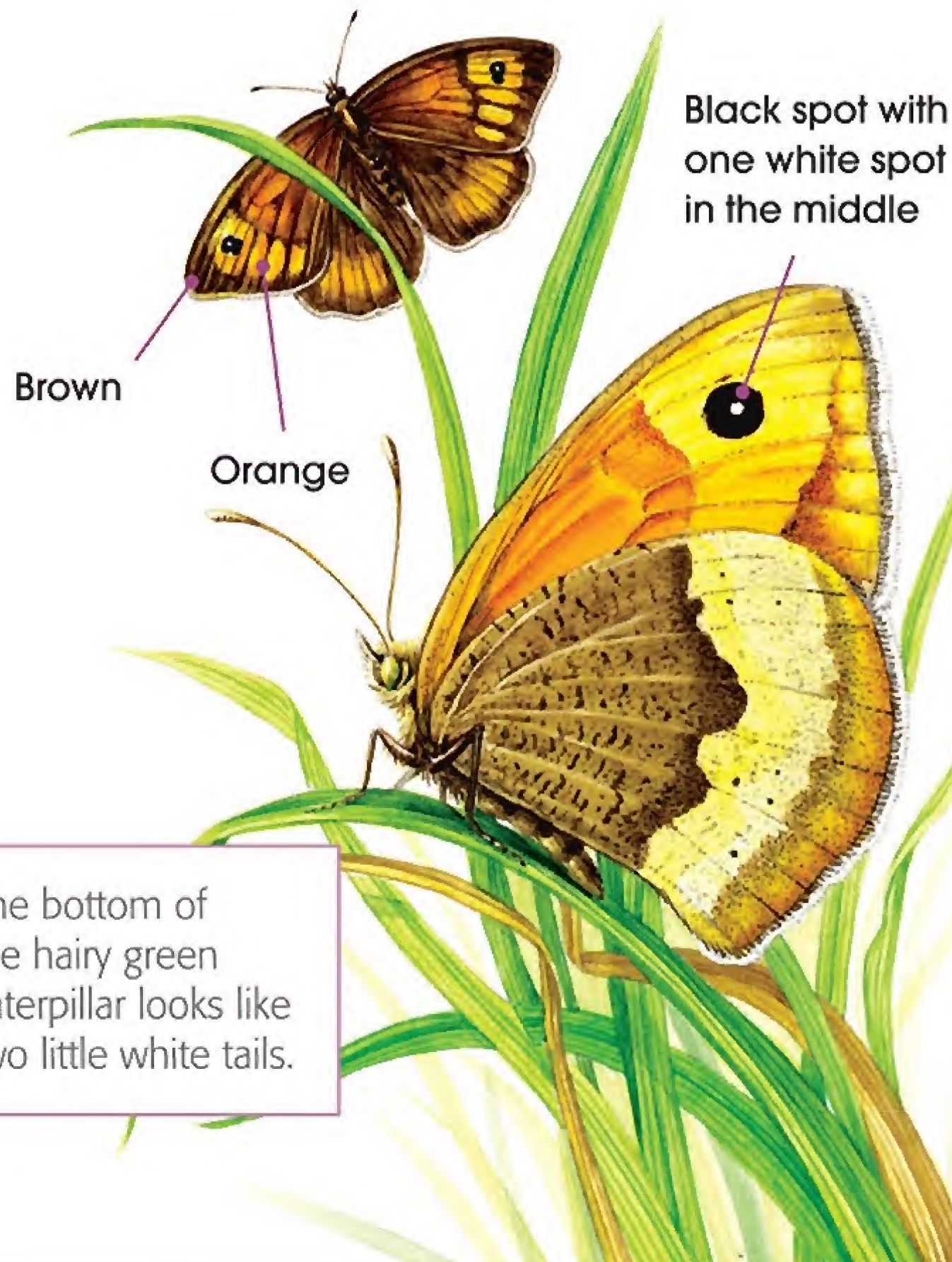
Front wings are orange and brown

Underside is grey and white



Meadow brown

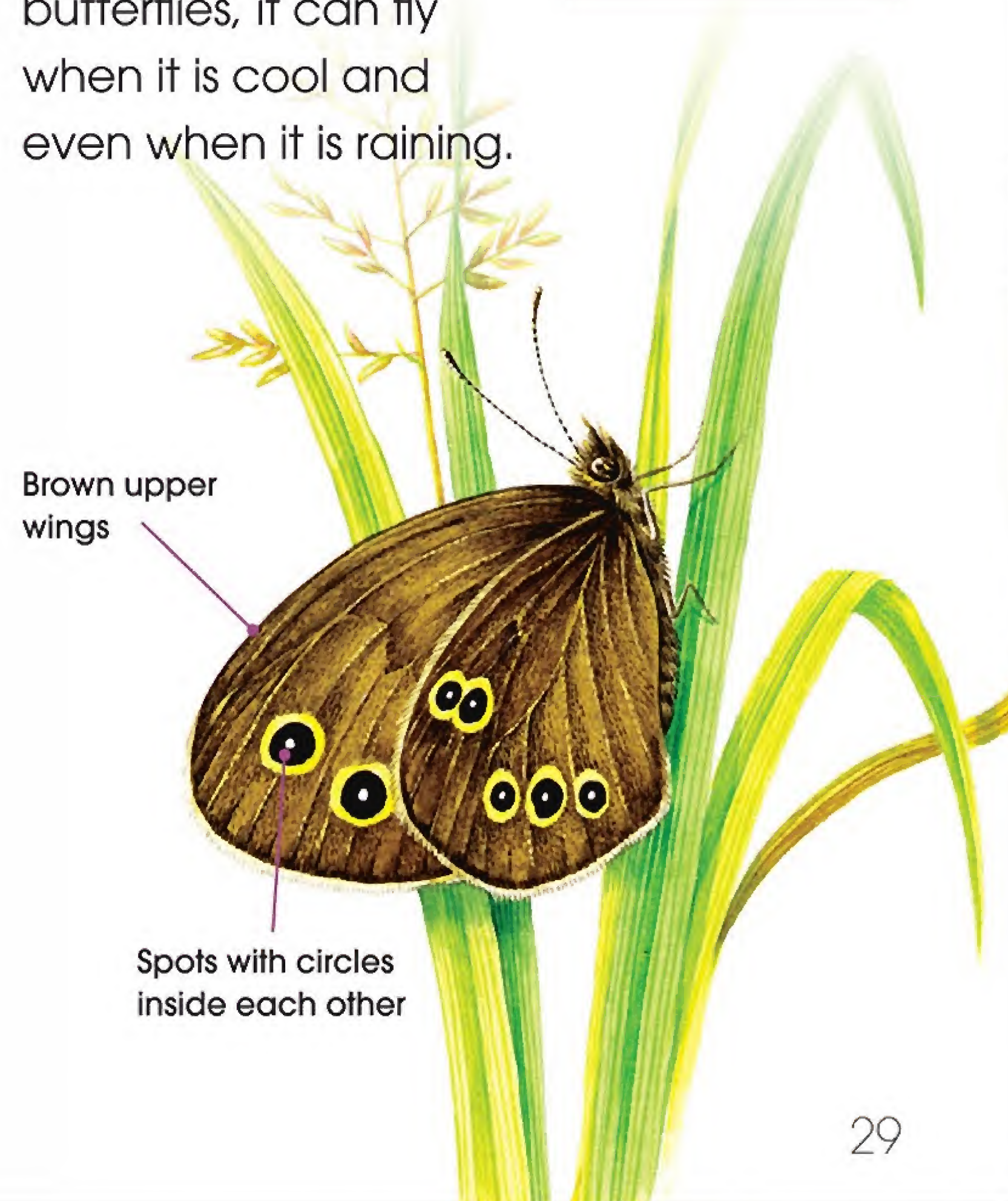
You will see lots of meadow browns in the countryside. Like many butterflies, it has only four legs that work. It has two shorter front legs. They don't seem to do anything useful.



Ringlet

This dark butterfly lives in damp, grassy places. Look for it in woodland. Unlike most butterflies, it can fly when it is cool and even when it is raining.

When it is scared by a bird, the caterpillar drops off the grass to the ground below.





Small heath

This tiny butterfly is not easy to see. It flies very close to the ground and lands with its wings closed. It lives in places that have long grass.



Males live for only a week and spend most of their short lives looking for a mate.



Burnet moth

Unlike most moths, burnet moths fly during the day. They don't fly very far or very fast. Look for them in summer, fluttering about in long grass.

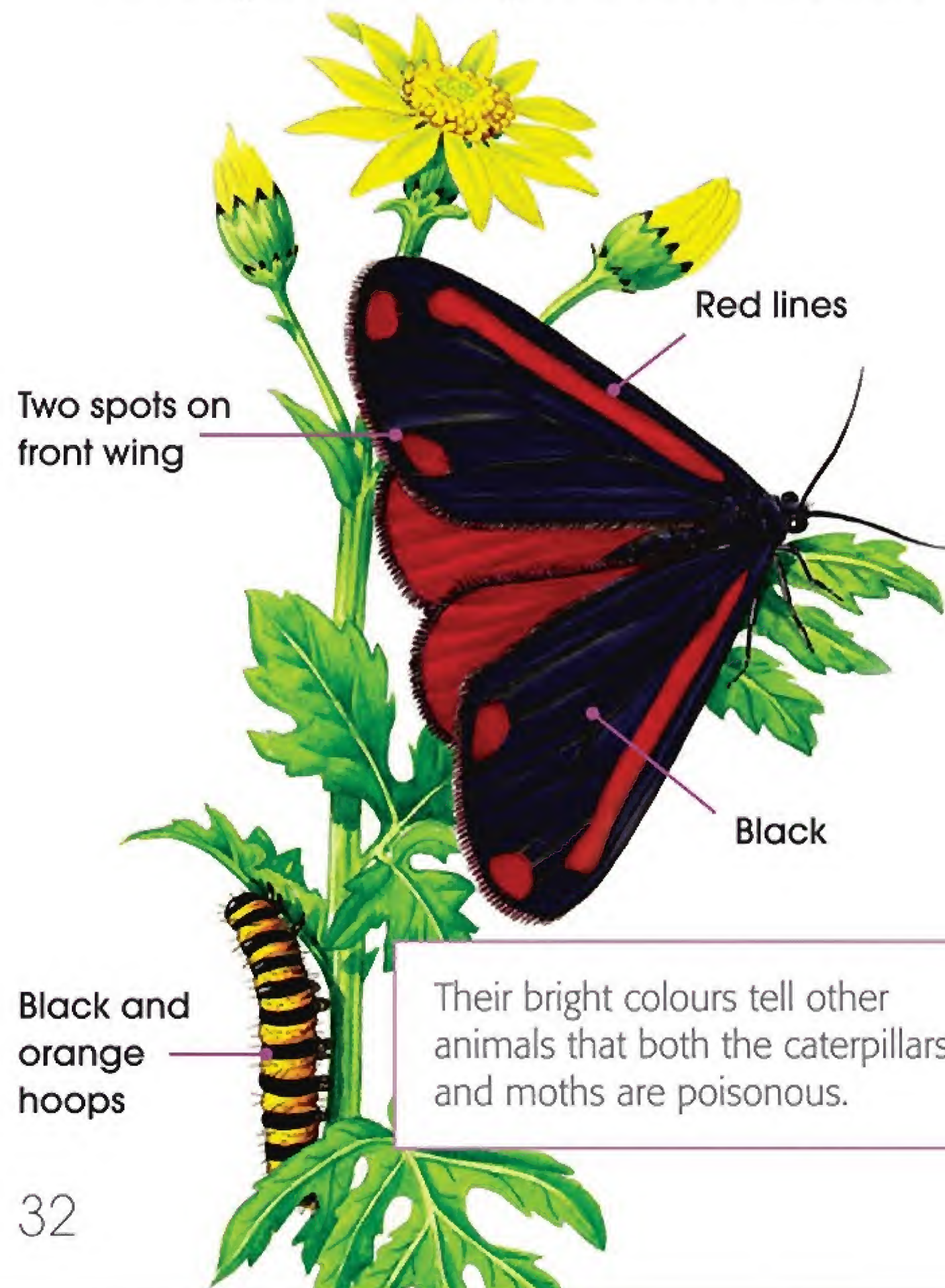
Red is for danger!
Burnet moths are poisonous so birds don't eat them.





Cinnabar moth

This moth flies in the day and night in grassy places. You are more likely to see its orange and black caterpillars. They sit out in the open on ragwort and groundsel flowers.



Poplar hawkmoth

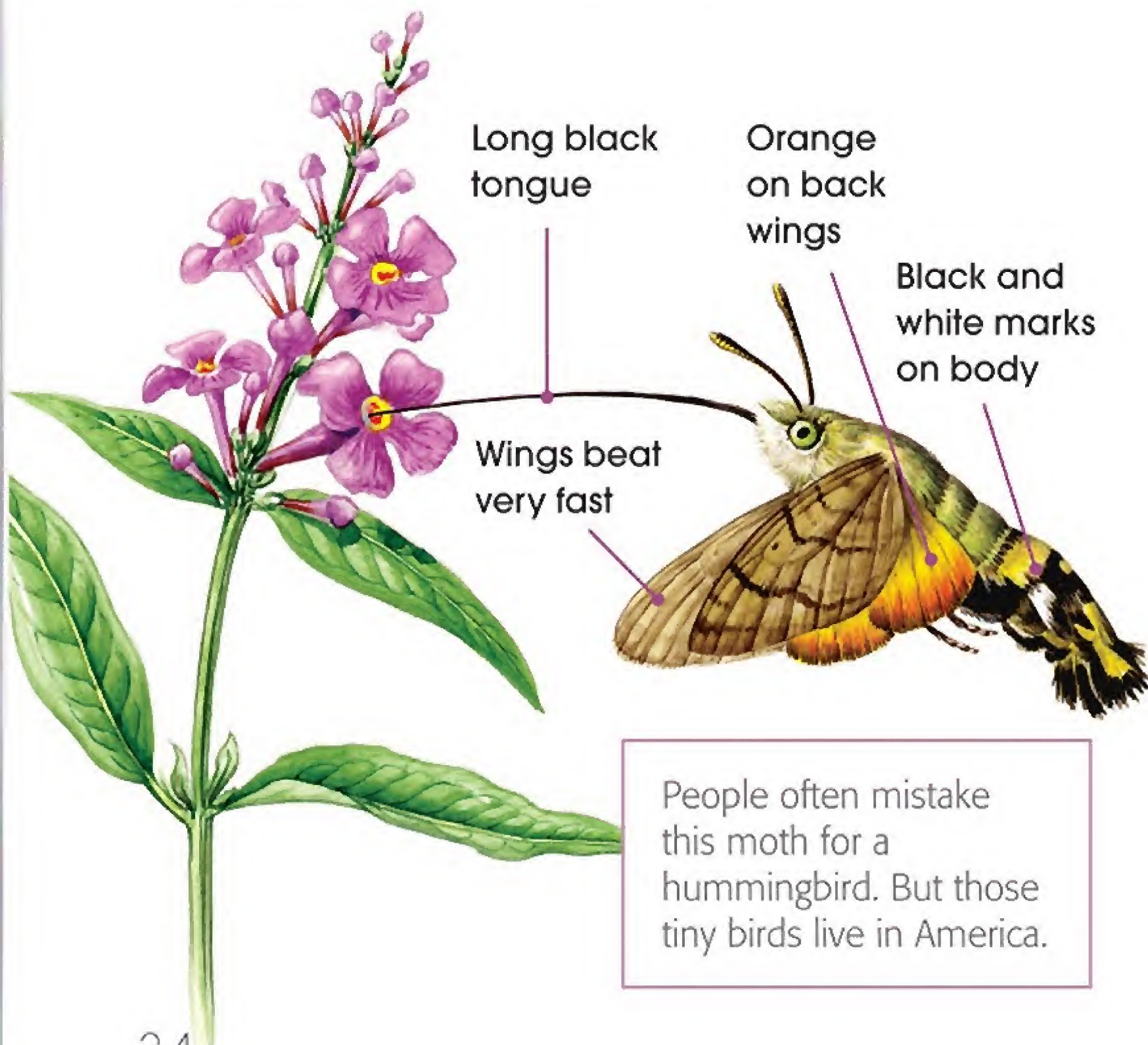
Don't be scared by this huge moth coming to your window at night. Like all moths, it is harmless. The moth is attracted to lights.





Hummingbird hawkmoth

This big moth beats its wings so fast they are hard to see. It flies up to a flower and hovers over it. Then it sticks its long tongue in to drink the nectar.



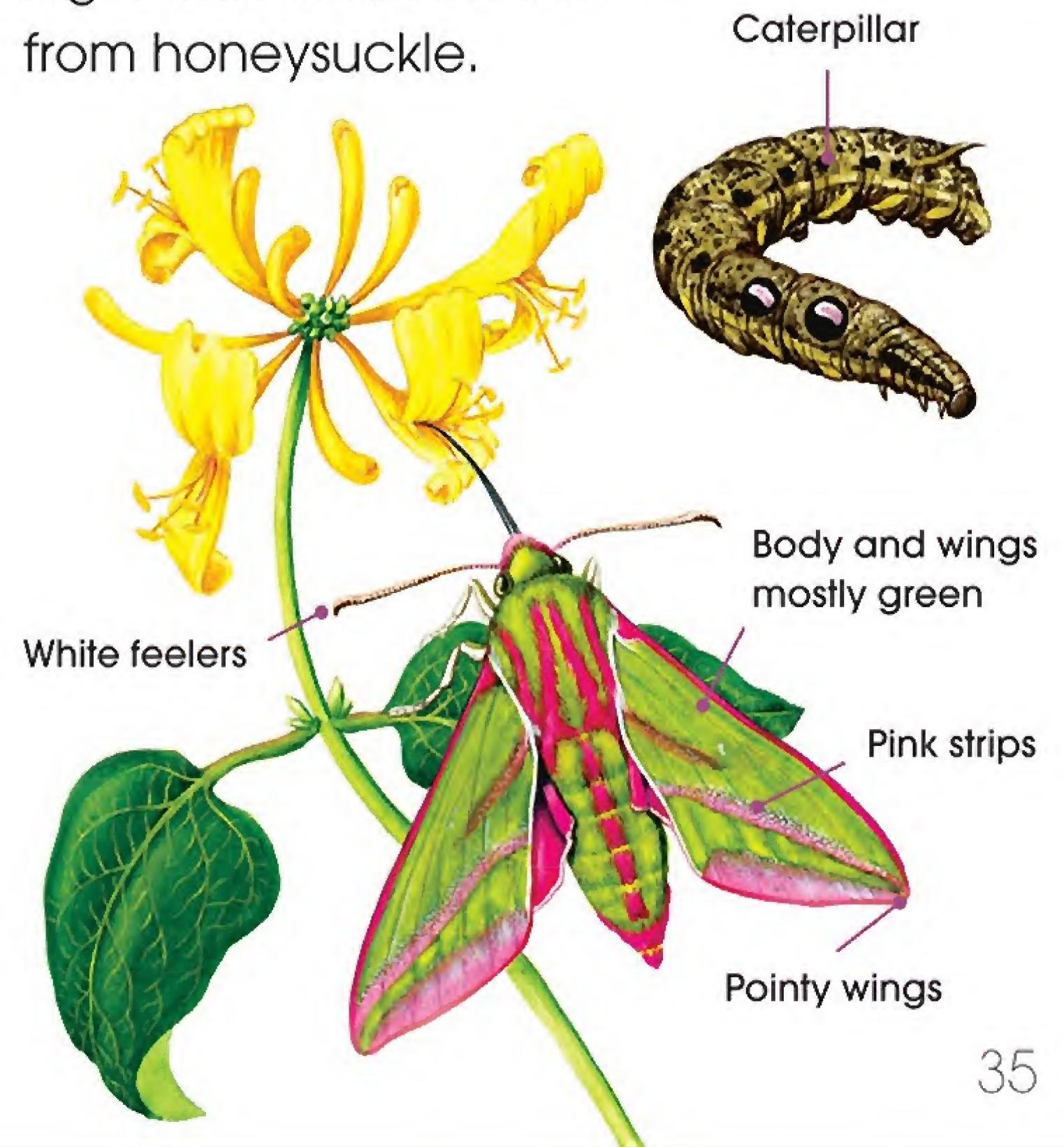
People often mistake this moth for a hummingbird. But those tiny birds live in America.



Elephant hawkmoth

This moth is named after its caterpillar. People say it looks like an elephant's trunk! The moth comes out at night and drinks nectar from honeysuckle.

When it is scared, the caterpillar tucks its head back into its body. Do you think it looks like a trunk?



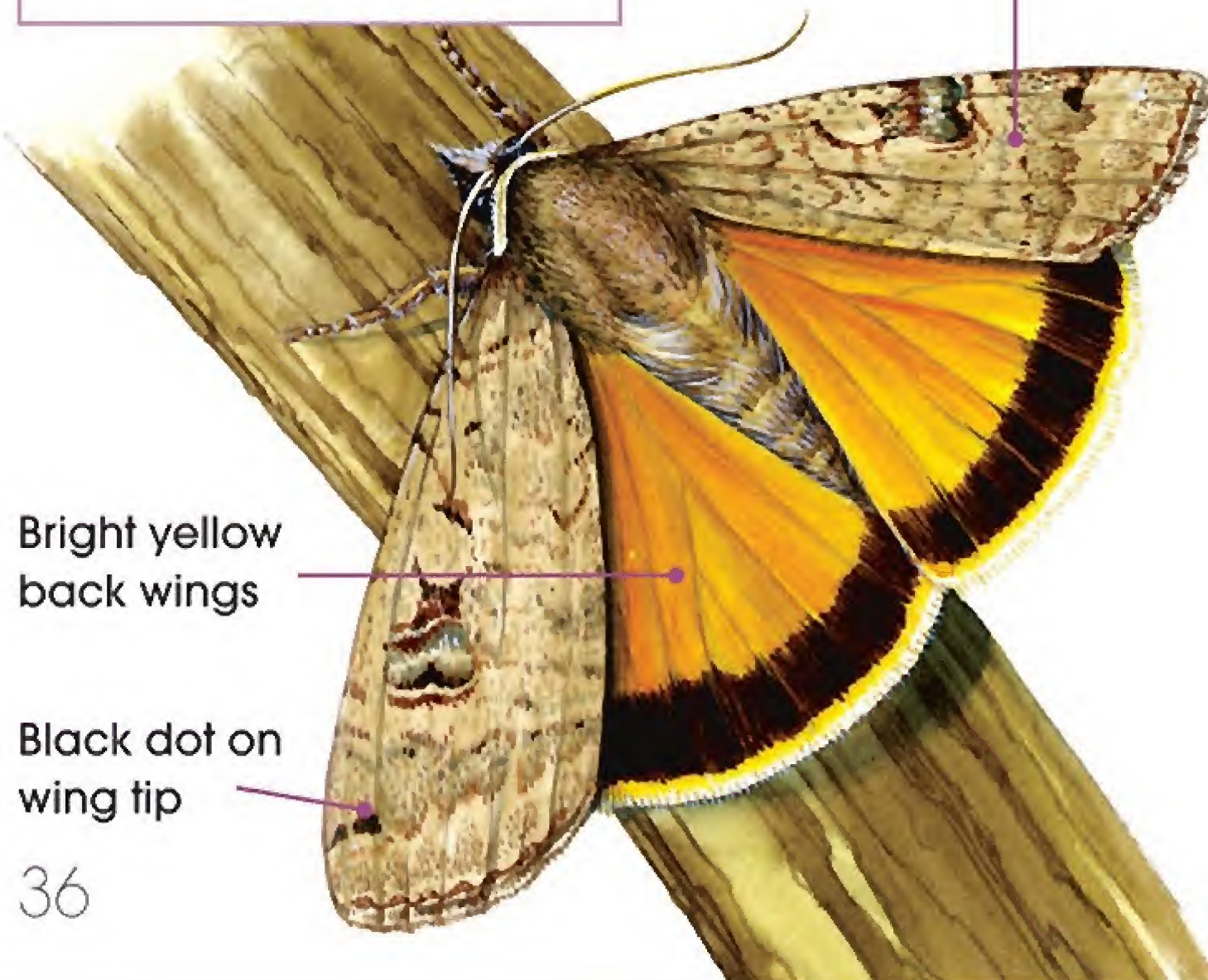


Large yellow underwing moth

Underwing moths rest on a tree trunk or the stem of a plant. They are very hard to see there. If something disturbs them, they lift their front wings. Then you can see their colourful back wings.

Birds are surprised when this moth shows its colourful back wings. This gives it time to escape.

Brown or grey front wings with a pattern like tree bark



Bright yellow back wings

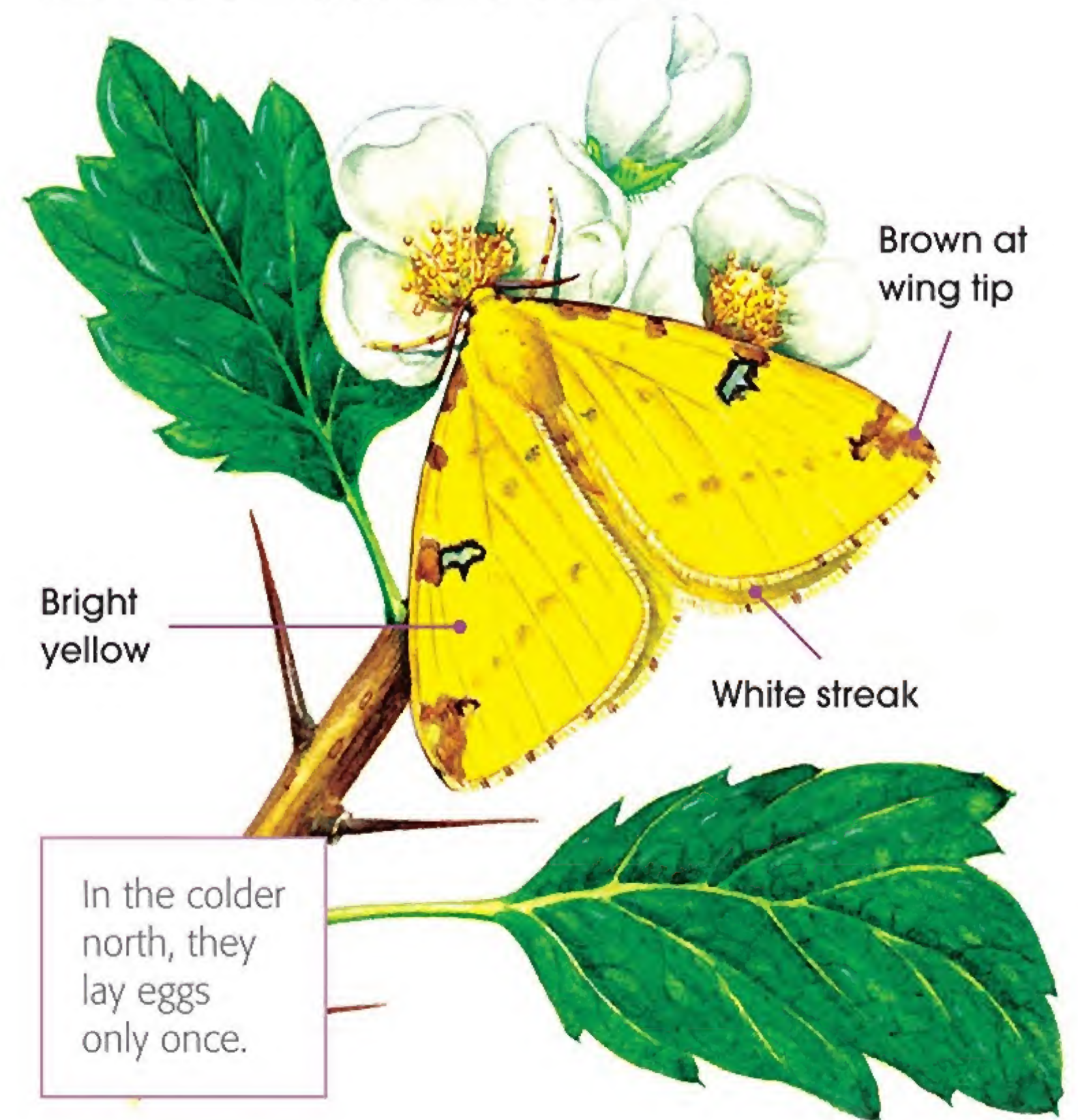
Black dot on wing tip



Brimstone moth

You can see this yellow moth in summer and autumn. It is attracted to light at night. The caterpillars feed on the leaves of trees and bushes.

In the south, brimstones can lay eggs three times in a year.



Brown at wing tip

Bright yellow

White streak

In the colder north, they lay eggs only once.



Buff-tip moth

This moth rests on a tree with its wings closed. Hungry birds think it is just a broken twig. It is a great way for the buff-tip to hide during the day.

Look for this moth in woods.

Very hairy middle

Body marked like the bark of a tree

Wings tucked in

Light brown tip

Angle shades moth



This moth looks a bit like a dead leaf! Its wings are lots of different green and brown colours. They look dry and crinkly.

The caterpillar digs into the soil in the autumn and makes a cocoon for itself.

This triangle is green and pink at first. It soon turns brown.

Wing looks as if it has folds

Long wing tips



Silver Y moth

The little silvery white Y marks on its wings give this moth its name. Look for silver Y moths in the garden just as it's getting dark. They are searching for flower nectar.

Most silver Y moths fly here from warmer countries.

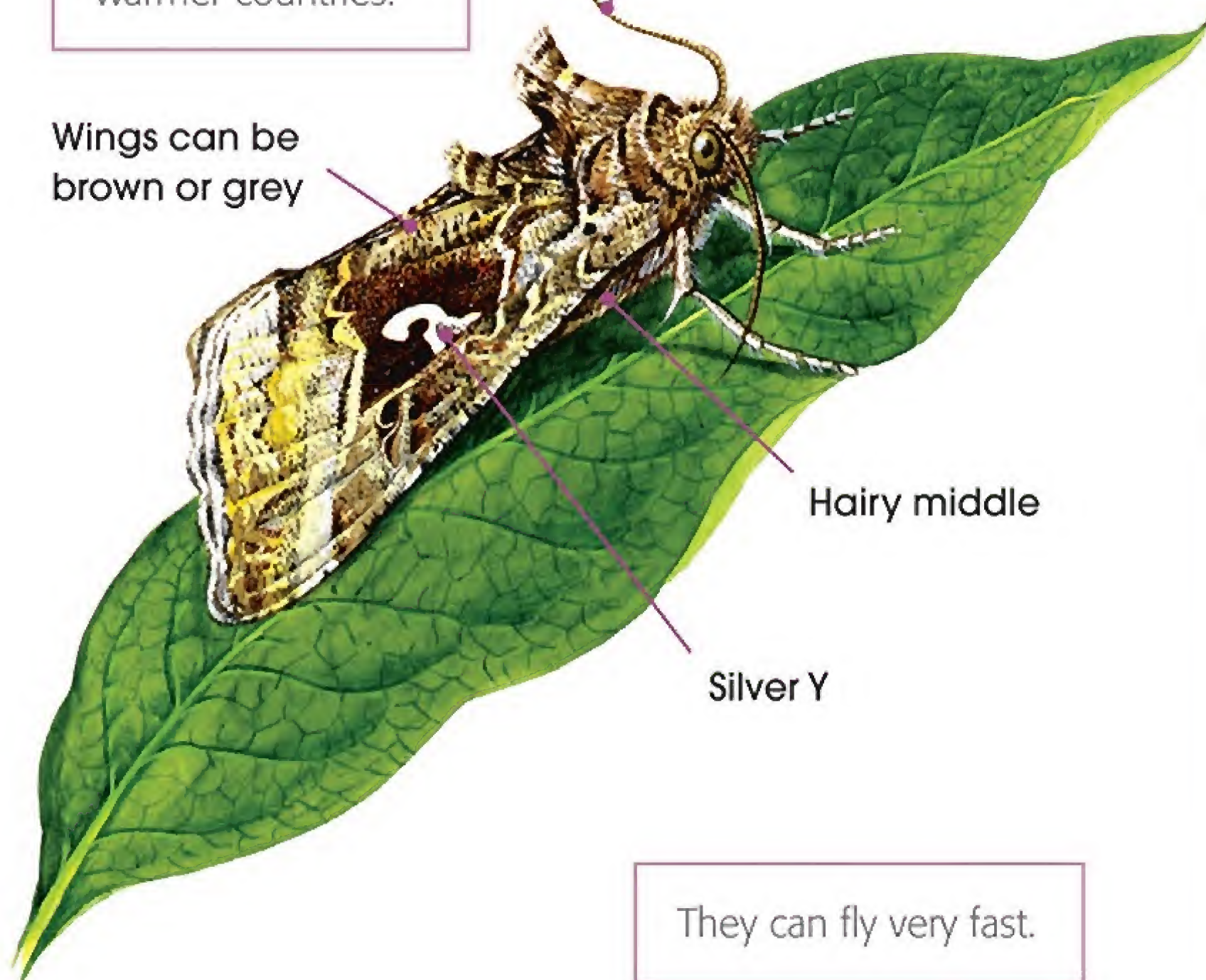
Wings can be brown or grey

Long feelers

Hairy middle

Silver Y

They can fly very fast.



The life of a butterfly

The female butterfly lays her eggs. Caterpillars hatch from the eggs.

When a caterpillar has grown big enough, its skin hardens and changes shape into a chrysalis (kriss-ah-liss). Some caterpillars also spin a cocoon around themselves.

The caterpillar turns into a butterfly inside the chrysalis. The chrysalis then opens up and the butterfly flies away.

Useful words

cocoon a cover that an insect wraps around itself for protection

nectar the sweet liquid that flowers make to attract insects

Spotter's guide

How many of these butterflies and moths have you seen?



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